

THE REGULARS



NOTES FROM THE NEW CINEMA

Bob Cowan

A program at NYC's Film Forum entitled "The Prestructured Image" brought together eight short films using a variety of optical and editing techniques to restructure the image as originally recorded in the camera. They had a cleverness and vitality of technique but they were basically slickly done academic exercises, as if film art had been reduced to the level of Musak. The films of Dan Hodgson were an exception: In *A Prepared Text* a speech is given on various aspects of film. The entire five minutes consist of one single take of the speech giver and the speech itself. In the first section the whole speech is present but with the pauses, stammers and stutters edited out. The second part contains only the stammers, stutters and pauses and no speech. The reality of the experience is not so much centered around what is being said but rather in how the reality of the mechanics of film-with-sound can create an experience independent of the subject matter. In this case the content of the subject matter happens to be about film and the end result is funny and irreverent.

San Francisco filmmaker Al Wong is one of the strongest of recent filmmakers from the West coast. My first exposure to his work was through his earlier films of passionate illustrated sensual-exotic nightmares. Out of this turbulence emerged his present style which, though basically conceptualist in form, contains strong underlying attachments to the spirit of his previous work. There is something quite emotional and personal in these new films, even though they are formal and "minimalist" in execution. In his program at the Millennium Film Workshop in New York he experimented with three different screen formats. In *Screen Projector and Film* the screen used was small, about thirty by forty inches. The image projected was a photographed piece

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of white cloth, very much like the screen itself; in fact it was very hard to tell which was which. Small ripples appear on the screen as if there were a fan moving it. (The ripples are actually projected) Paint then appears to drip down the screen from an unseen source along the top. The screen is bleeding. The image catches fire and burns away until only the flames remain. A light rises up from the base of the screen, pure white light, that eventually spreads over the whole surface. The back support rod (it's a stand-up fold-up screen) is visible through the fabric, or at least the projected image of the screen rod makes us think so. The light then passes off the screen altogether. This is followed by the light returning once again after a period of greyness without the rod showing. The flickering wrinkles return as the whiteness of the light increases. The screen remains still for a moment before it cuts away to black. It was like watching the creative process of a painting that paints itself. The entire choreographed series of changes was magical and sensuous in feeling. The small screen in the middle of the large theatre space gave the work a kind of intimacy it would not have had on a large screen. The small screen seemed to be

creating its own imagery without benefit of film or projection—at least one was able to isolate the image to that extent quite easily. It appeared to float there in the darkness.

The second film, entitled *24 Frames Per Second*, was projected on a normal size theatre screen. The sound was the sound of the sprocket holes going by. We see a burning bubbling hole enlarged. The bubbles churn and twitch like some restless volcano. The quivering image of the burning hole fluctuates in apparent synchronization with the sound. The screen is dark during the second part except for vertical flashing lines that flow by like rainfall. Shapes appear. Vibrant orange-red insect-like forms seem at war with other corresponding shapes. Enigmatic objects, knives, brushes (?) interrupt and create textural excitement resembling a flurry of hysterical birds in flight. The screen becomes dark followed by silence. Water droplets as large as boulders fill the image; rich encrustations of lip forms, wet and larvae shaped, contain the space, followed by more bubbling and burning away. The screen has gone completely red.

Corner Film is just as the title suggests. Two projectors are used, the films projected at right angles to each other in the corner of the room, both touching each other along the vertical edge. A man passes a rope from one screen to the adjacent one. There is a constant play back and forth starting from one screen and continuing in the other. The performers that appear in each screen change places with each other in the middle of the various events. They freely walk from image to image, and one forgets after a while that one is actually looking at two different screens, two different films; occasionally they go slightly out of sync, creating a time-lapse tension between the two. This is the no-man's land where the transfers take place. When they go out of sync it's as if time in between has been partially swallowed up. This is followed by simultaneous panning of both cameras. The two images appear to fold in on one another, a very astounding and eerie effect. As the cameras pan in circular motion, each image describing its own circular arc, the images seem to move away from each other and fold together at the same time. What begins as a clever experiment changes gradually into a tension interrelationship between forms with time as the adhesive that either holds them together or pulls them apart.

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